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CRPF SEEKS 35 NEW BATTALIONS TO BOOST ANTI-TERROR OPERATIONS

The Central Reserve Police Force has sought the Union home ministry's approval to raise 35 new battalions, senior officials said on Wednesday

STRENGTH OF FORCE TO GROW BY 35,000

If the Centre approves the proposal, the total strength of the force will increase by 35,000. At present, the CRPF has 246 battalions. With the added strength, the force aims to raise specialised units with a particular emphasis on tackling terrorist threats in Jammu and Kashmir. It comes at a time when the Central force is tightening its noose around Maoists in insurgency-hit areas

FIRST CAPACITY EXPANSION SINCE LAST YEAR

- The decision to raise new battalions comes amid a sense of career stagnation among officers of the CRPF with many working in the same post for years. Some have left the force as a result
- Last year, the government approved the creation of two Signal Battalion headquarters for the CRPF, in first expansion since 1988

3.13 lakh

THE TOTAL STRENGTH OF THE CRPF AS PER THE UNION HOME MINISTRY

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

PM sees plot in Patnaik 'ill health'

Cites video of Odisha CM's aide V K Pandian grabbing his boss' hand to make the charge

BIJOY PRADHAN @ Bhubaneswar

WITH Narendra Modi leading the BJP's charge to wrest power from the BJD in Odisha, the prime minister on Wednesday made a rather unusual remark on the health of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik.

Modi wondered if there was a conspiracy behind the 'deteriorating health' of the Odisha CM. The statement came a day after a video of Naveen's close aide V K Pandian grabbing the CM's left hand at an election rally went viral.

"I want to bring to your notice a very grave concern about Naveen Babu. Well wishers of Naveen Babu are worried at the sudden deterioration of his health in the last one year. People who have long been working with him now say Naveen Babu can't do anything on his own. They also speculate that it could be a conspiracy," Modi said at the three public meetings he addressed at Baripada, Balasore and Kendrapara on the day. "Is there a lobby behind this, the one which is enjoying power in the state taking advantage of Naveen Babu?" the PM wondered.

Modi at a rally in Balasore district | PTI

ODISHA CM'S PUSHBACK

"Let me assure the PM that I am in perfect health and I have been campaigning for the last month," Naveen told the media in his pushback. He blamed the BJP for spreading rumours about his health

In his rather sharp rebuttal, Naveen said: "If the PM is so concerned, all he had to do was to pick up the telephone and ask, as he had stated publicly before that he was a good friend of mine."

Modi went on to claim that when BJP forms government in the state, a special committee will be formed to investigate the issue. "We will make the findings of that report public," he said.

It was Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma who started the row by posting the video on micro-blogging site X on Tuesday. "After today's viral video, there is no need for a medical report on Naveen Babu's health. Our issue is not with Naveen Babu but with Pandian who is illegally controlling Odisha," he alleged.

Sarma, who has been campaigning extensively in the state, claimed a retired officer has tried to physically control the hands of a sitting CM for the first time in history.

On Wednesday, he posted another such video, which was mentioned by BJP national vice president Jay Panda at the Kendrapara event of the PM.

Mirzapur weighs the hat-trick question

ANURAAG SINGH @ Varanasi

MINISTER of State for Commerce and Industry Anupriya Patel, 43, is braving the heat and dust of Uttar Pradesh's Mirzapur to reach out to the constituency's voters who elected her in 2014 and 2019. She is eyeing a third term to boost the prospects of her party Apna Dal-Sonelal, which has grown to become a staunch ally of the BJP in Uttar Pradesh.

Daughter of Apna Dal founder and OBC leader Sonelal Patel, Anupriya is pitched against Ramesh Bind, the sitting BJP MP from adjoining Bhadohi who joined the SP after the saffron party denied him a ticket.

According to observers, Anupriya's hat-trick chances are not that strong as she is facing multiple challenges including anti-incumbency, allegations of bias towards her Kurmi vote base, and a possible electoral backlash from the Thakur community following her remarks against Raghuraj Pratap Singh 'Raja Bhaiya'.

Mirzapur has a chequered history, having sent the likes of Bandit Queen Phoolan Devi and dreaded dacoit Shiv Kumar Patel's brother Bal Kumar Patel to Parliament in the past. The constituency has a good number of OBCs, SC/ST communities, Thakurs and Brahmins, and the caste dynamics can influence the results.

Anupriya's recent statement that "now kings are born from EVMs and not the wombs of queens" triggered a controversy as it was interpreted as targeting the powerful Thakur politician Raghuraj Pratap Singh, descendent of an erstwhile royal family. His supporters are now campaigning against Patel.

SHOWTIME FOR GLADIATORS

However, some see the controversy as a blessing in disguise for Anupriya, who was earlier facing polarisation of backward sections towards SP's Bind. "Now there is reverse polarisation of Brahmins, OBCs and most backward voters in support of her," says senior journalist Neeraj Pandey.

Also, such a reverse consolidation in Patel's favour could damage the poll prospects of BSP candidate Manish Tiwari.

ILLUSTRATION: MANDAR PARIKAR

Anupriya Patel (C), Ramesh Bind (L) and Manish Tiwari

Flight ticket booked, will Prajwal arrive tomorrow?

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

HASSAN MP Prajwal Revanna, who is wanted in the alleged sexual abuse cases, is likely to arrive in Bengaluru on Friday morning.

A business class ticket has been booked in his name. Prajwal may board the Lufthansa flight (A350-900) at the Munich International Airport at 12.05 pm on Thursday and land in Bengaluru at 12.30 am the next day. However, his phone number and email address have not been mentioned in the flight ticket.

As per ticket details, Prajwal is supposed to board the flight at terminal 2 of the Munich airport and land at terminal 2 of the Kempegowda International Airport (KIA).

On Monday, Prajwal posted a video claiming that he will appear before the SIT on Friday at 10 am. If Prajwal lands at KIA, SIT sleuths will pick him from the immigration centre as the special court for elected representatives has issued an arrest warrant against him. The MP flew to Germany on April 27 with his diplomatic passport, which is valid till November 30.

Home Minister Dr G Parameshwara told reporters on Wednesday that "Prajwal will have to be arrested at the airport as a warrant has been issued against him. The SIT is waiting for him." Whoever is involved in the alleged sexual abuse cases will be arrested. Around 12 people have already been arrested, he said. P4

Bhushan's convoy hits bike, kills 2

NAMITA BAJPAI @ Lucknow

TWO youth on a bike were killed after they were hit by a speeding SUV which was allegedly part of the convoy of Karan Bhushan Singh, the BJP candidate in Kaiserganj, on Wednesday in UP's Gonda district. Karan Singh is the son of sitting MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, former chairman of Wrestling Federation of India, who faces allegations of sexual harassment.

Police have seized the SUV and arrested the driver. It was not immediately known if the Bhushans were in the convoy.

Karnalganj SHO Nirbhay Narayan Singh identified the deceased as Shehzad Khan (20), who was riding the bike, and his cousin Rehan Khan (17).

After ramming the bike, the SUV also hit Sita Devi (60), who was walking on the roadside. She has been hospitalised and police personnel have been deployed in the area to ensure law and order.

The speed of the vehicles in the convoy was above 100 kmph, said an official.

52.9°C All-time record as Delhi sizzles

JITENDRA CHOUBEY @ New Delhi

DELHI hit an all-time record with the weather station at Mungeshpur on Wednesday recording a maximum temperature of 52.9 degrees Celsius, triggering concern across the country.

However, scientists at the India Meteorological Department are examining sensors and data of the weather station for any potential error or a local factor for the reading spike.

During the day, the maximum temperature over other parts of the city varied from 45.2°C to 49.1°C. In the evening, drizzles accompanied by winds brought some relief for the people in the area adjoining Delhi-NCR.

North India has been reeling from an unprecedented heatwave with temperatures soaring to record-breaking highs in many cities. In the past few days, many weather stations in the northwestern region have reported temperatures close to 50°C. In many places, the heat was about 8 degrees above normal.

In Bihar, over 50 students reportedly fainted on Wednesday due to the heat. In Rajasthan, the deaths of at least 33 people over the past week are blamed on the prevailing heatwave.

Delhi Lt Governor V K Saxena directed officials to ensure a paid break for labourers from noon to 3 pm.

The weather office has predicted that the prevailing heatwave conditions over the northwest are likely to reduce from May 30 on account of a western disturbance that will bring light to moderate rainfall in the region. Thereafter, heatwave days will continue in June.

In the south, Kerala is expected to welcome the southwest monsoon on Thursday.

EXPRESS READ

No urgent listing of Kejriwal's plea

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court registry on Wednesday refused urgent listing of Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal's plea seeking extension of his interim bail by seven days for undergoing certain medical tests.

Driverless Metro train's signaling tests from June 7

S LALITHA @ Bengaluru

WITH the stationary testing of the first unmanned train to be run by BMRCL nearing completion, tests related to integration of the signaling system with the prototype train are all set to commence on June 7.

These are part of the mainline testing of the driverless train, according to senior Metro officials. Commercial operations on the RV Road-Bommasandra Line (Yellow Line) will be launched in December as planned, they said.

BMRCL has plans to run a trip every 20 minutes initially with 57 onward and return trips daily. The 18.82 km elevated line has all its 16 stations and other infrastructure ready. But the much-awaited launch has not happened due to the delay in supply of communications-based train control (CBTC) trains by the Chinese firm, CRRC Nanjing Puzhen.

TNIE was given exclusive access to the operations bay of the Hebbagodi depot where the train from Shanghai, which arrived on February 14 via Chennai, is undergoing various static tests. "Static tests are done when the train is stationary. They include signal and software checks, wiring, some interface (communication between different equipment) and functional checks. We have almost completed them," a Metro source said. CONTINUED ON: P5

BMRCL engineers carry out static tests at the inspection bay of Hebbagodi depot, for the first driverless Metro train